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From Activism to Apathy: The American People and Nuclear Weapons, 1963–1980

Paul Boyer

Writing in 1981, George F. Kennan described Americans' response to the threat of nuclear war thus: "We have gone on piling weapon upon weapon, missile upon missile, new levels of destructiveness upon old ones. We have done this helplessly, almost involuntarily, like the victims of some sort of hypnotism, like men in a dream, like lemmings headed for the sea."¹ Eloquent as it is, Kennan's generalization is not wholly applicable. Americans have not always behaved like lemmings in confronting the nuclear danger; their engagement with that threat has gone through several distinct cycles of activism and apparent passivity. When directed to the years from 1963 to the late 1970s, however, Kennan's observations seem chillingly accurate. In those years public involvement with the nuclear weapons issue sank to a low level indeed. This article explores some of the sources of nuclear apathy during that protracted interval.

Our starting point is September 24, 1963, when the Senate ratified with overwhelming approval the Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty agreed on earlier in Moscow. The treaty also won enthusiastic public and journalistic support. David Lawrence, of the conservative *United States News and World Report*, wrote: "There's a new word in the vocabulary of the day—or at least a more noticeable use of an old word—euphoria." Even I. F. Stone, a skeptical, left-wing Washington journalist not easily given to flights of enthusiasm, observed: "Peace has broken out, and hope leaps up again." The treaty did not halt all tests; underground nuclear explosions were still permitted. Nevertheless, it was welcomed as the beginning of a process that would ultimately free the world of the nuclear menace. Expressing the prevailing view, the *New York Times* hailed the agreement in a front-page banner headline as a "Major Step toward Easing Tension."²

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¹ George F. Kennan, "A Modest Proposal," *New York Review of Books*, July 16, 1981, p. 14.

² *New York Times*, July 26, 1963, p. 1; David Lawrence, "Euphoria," *United States News and*

Underlying that collective sigh of relief was the fact that for more than a decade the nation had been gripped by profound nuclear fears. America's atomic monopoly had ended in 1949, and in the 1950s the United States and the Soviet Union had developed the hydrogen bomb, intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), and sophisticated control systems that raised the specter of a push-button war that could snuff out millions of lives in the blink of an eye. In those same years Great Britain and France also had developed and tested atomic weapons.

Feeding the nuclear anxieties of these years was a heavy official emphasis on civil defense. Under the Operation Alert program of the Federal Civil Defense Administration, evacuation plans, radio alert systems, warning sirens, school air-raid drills, and films on how to survive a nuclear attack became familiar features of American life. In May 1961, demonstrating his strength of will before the Vienna summit conference, President John F. Kennedy went on television to urge a national shelter program. A few weeks later, during a period of East-West confrontation over Berlin, Kennedy delivered an even more alarmist speech on the danger of nuclear war and the urgent necessity of civil defense preparation. Responding to a deluge of panicky requests, the administration hastily prepared a civil defense booklet and distributed thirty-five million copies through schools, post offices, and newspapers. The Cuban missile crisis added a grim immediacy to these fears. For a few days in October 1962, Kennedy's warnings seemed about to become reality sooner than anyone had imagined.³

Further, as Robert A. Divine has shown, these were years shadowed by fears of nuclear testing. The first United States hydrogen bomb test, in 1952, produced unexpectedly high radiation levels. The 1954 test series spread radioactive ash over seven thousand square miles of the Pacific Ocean and brought illness and death to Japanese fishermen working eighty-five miles from the test site. Soviet hydrogen bomb tests, begun in 1954 and continued through the decade, further contaminated the atmosphere. In 1955 radioactive rain fell on Chicago. In 1959 deadly strontium-90 began to show up in wheat and milk. A two-part *Saturday Evening Post* feature that year was entitled "Fallout: The Silent Killer." Linus Pauling, Barry Commoner, and other scientists warned of leukemia, bone cancer, and long-term genetic damage triggered by nuclear testing. A full-blown fallout scare pervaded the nation.⁴

World Report, October 7, 1963, p. 132; I. F. Stone, "Why and How Did Peace Suddenly Break Out?" *I. F. Stone's Bi-Weekly*, Sept. 2, 1963, p. 1; George H. Gallup, ed., *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935-1971* (3 vols., New York, 1972), III, 1837; "The Treaty and the Trial," *Columbia Journalism Review*, 2 [Fall 1963], 15-20.

³ Elie Abel, *The Missile Crisis* (New York, 1966); Neal Fitzsimmons, "Brief History of American Civil Defense," in *Who Speaks for Civil Defense?*, ed. Eugene P. Wigner (New York, 1968), 28-46; Thomas J. Kerr, "The Civil Defense Shelter Program: A Case Study of the Politics of National Security Policy Making" (Ph.D. diss., Syracuse University, 1969).

⁴ Robert A. Divine, *Blowing on the Wind: The Nuclear Test Ban Debate, 1954-1960* (New York, 1978), 4, 42, 127, 262-80; Steven M. Spencer, "Fallout: The Silent Killer," *Saturday Evening Post*, Aug. 29, 1959, pp. 26, 89; *ibid.*, Sept. 5, 1959, p. 86; "Yearly Fallout Totals Pass Safety Guidelines in Some Areas," *Sane World*, Dec. 1, 1962; William Cuyler Sullivan, Jr., *Nuclear Democracy: A History of the Greater St. Louis Citizens' Committee for Nuclear Information, 1957-1967* (St. Louis, 1982).

These fears gave rise to a campaign against nuclear testing. Adlai Stevenson raised the issue in the 1956 presidential race. Soon it was taken up by such groups as Leo Szilard's Council for a Liveable World, Bernard Lown's Physicians for Social Responsibility, and the Student Peace Union (SPU). Formed in Chicago in 1959, the SPU over the next few years attracted hundreds of delegates to its national conventions.⁵ By far the most important of these organizations was the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE). A publicity and lobbying organization, SANE was conceived in 1957 by several veteran peace activists who persuaded Norman Cousins of the *Saturday Review* and Clarence Pickett of the American Friends Service Committee to serve as cochairmen. With an imposing list of public figures and celebrities as sponsors, SANE announced itself in November 1957 with a large *New York Times* advertisement that proclaimed, "We are facing a danger unlike any danger that has ever existed." (Another memorable SANE ad—the work of the Doyle, Dane, and Bernbach advertising agency—featured famed baby doctor Benjamin Spock gazing with furrowed brow at a young girl under the caption: "Dr. Spock Is Worried.") A high point of SANE activism came in May 1960 when thousands attended a SANE-sponsored rally in New York's Madison Square Garden to hear speakers ranging from Republican Alfred M. Landon to socialist Norman Thomas call for an end to the nuclear arms race. After the rally five thousand people accompanied Thomas on a march to the United Nations. The organized test ban campaign unquestionably intensified public opposition to testing, although Soviet-American relations also influenced the opposition, which diminished at times of heightened tension and surged upward when tension eased. By late 1959, nevertheless, 77 percent of Americans favored a continuation of the temporary moratorium on nuclear testing then in effect.⁶

Nuclear fear was a shaping cultural force in these years. Books, essays, symposia, and conferences explored the medical, psychological, and ethical implications of atomic weapons. In the realm of fiction, bestsellers such as *On the Beach*, *Cat's Cradle*, and *Fail-Safe*, as well as less familiar works—Dexter Masters's *The Accident*, Helen Clarkson's *The Last Day*, and Walter Miller, Jr.'s science-fiction classic *A Canticle for Leibowitz*—offered visions of nuclear holocaust.⁷

⁵ Divine, *Blowing on the Wind*, 72–73; Lawrence S. Wittner, *Rebels against War: The American Peace Movement, 1941–1960* (New York, 1969), 240–48; Fox Butterfield, "Anatomy of the Nuclear Protest," *New York Times Magazine*, July 11, 1982, p. 17; David H. Kelley to Paul Boyer, Jan. 17, 1983 (in Boyer's possession).

⁶ Eugene J. Rosi, "Mass and Attentive Opinion on Nuclear Weapons Tests and Fallout, 1954–1963," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 29 (Summer 1965), 283; Divine, *Blowing on the Wind*, 165–69, 196, 203; D. F. K. [Donald F. Keys], "Seven Years for a Sane Nuclear Policy," *Sane World*, April 15, 1964; Wittner, *Rebels against War*, 242–45, 257–58; Barbra Deming, "The Ordeal of SANE," *Nation*, March 11, 1961, pp. 200, 204–05.

⁷ Nevil Shute, *On the Beach* (New York, 1957); Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., *Cat's Cradle* (New York, 1963); Eugene Burdick and Harvey Wheeler, *Fail-Safe* (New York, 1962); Dexter Masters, *The Accident* (New York, 1955); Helen Clarkson [Helen McCloy], *The Last Day* (New York, 1959); Walter M. Miller, Jr., *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (New York, 1959). Of the vast nonfiction nuclear literature of these years, a few representative titles are Paul Ramsey, *War and the Christian Conscience: How Shall Modern War Be Conducted Justly?* (Durham, N.C., 1961); Norman

The film versions of *On the Beach* and *Fail-Safe*, as well as Stanley Kubrick's brilliant satire, *Dr. Strangelove*, attracted large audiences. Indeed, the Dwight D. Eisenhower administration was deeply concerned about the movie *On the Beach*. At a cabinet meeting in December 1959, civil defense director Leo Hoegh criticized it as "very harmful because it produced a feeling of utter hopelessness, thus undermining OCDM's efforts to encourage preparedness." An analysis of the film by the State Department and the United States Information Agency included the warning that its "strong emotional appeal for banning nuclear weapons could conceivably lead audiences to think in terms of radical solutions . . . rather than . . . practical safeguarded disarmament measures." Insisting that the film's ending, as the doomed Australians choose suicide in preference to death from radioactivity, "grossly misconstrues the basic nature of man," the writers declared: "It is inconceivable that even in the event of a nuclear war, mankind would not have the strength and ingenuity to take all possible steps toward self-preservation."⁸

The nuclear preoccupation of the period 1954–1963 surfaced at all cultural levels, from the poetry of Robert Lowell and the meditations of Thomas Merton to such television series as "The Outer Limits" and Rod Serling's "The Twilight Zone." Those shows, when not dealing explicitly with radioactivity, genetic mutation, and atomic war, conjured up tales of vague, unseen menaces. The number of science-fiction stories dealing with nuclear war increased dramatically from the mid-1950s through the early 1960s, diminishing sharply thereafter. A spate of mutant movies in these years—*The H-Man*, *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, *Attack of the Crab Monsters*, *The Blob*, *it*, *Them!*, and so on—had clear psychological roots in fears of genetic damage from radioactive fallout. At the end of *Them!*, the movie in which twelve-foot ants emerge from a New Mexico test site, the scientist-hero draws the moral: in the nuclear age such things must be expected.⁹ Small wonder the test ban aroused such euphoria.

It is what happened next that is surprising. Considering the pre-1963 level of activism and concern, the sudden fading of the nuclear-weapons issue after September 1963, whether as an activist cause, a cultural motif, or a topic of public discourse, is striking indeed. The number of articles about nuclear weapons in

Cousins, *In Place of Folly* (New York, 1962); F. R. Ervin et al., "The Medical Consequences of Thermonuclear War," *New England Journal of Medicine*, 266 (May 31, 1962), 1127–37; Gunther Anders, "Reflections on the H-Bomb," *Dissent*, 3 (Spring 1956), 146–55; and Judith Viorst, "Nuclear Threat Harms Children," *Science News Letter*, 83 (February 16, 1963), 106–07.

⁸ Jack G. Shaheen, ed., *Nuclear War Films* (Carbondale, Ill., 1978); Minutes of cabinet meeting, Dec. 11, 1959, "Cabinet Meeting of Dec. 11, 1959" folder, box 15, Cabinet series, Ann Whiteman file, Dwight D. Eisenhower Papers as President of the United States (Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kans.); Joint USIA-State INFOGUIDE 60-24, "On the Beach," Dec. 4, 1959, *ibid.*

⁹ Andrew Dowdy, *The Films of the Fifties* (New York, 1975), 159–71; Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York, 1965), 209–25; Stephen King, *Danse Macabre* (New York, 1979), 153–60; Robin Cross, *The Big Book of B Movies; or, How Low Was My Budget* (New York, 1982), 112–33; Marc Scott Zicree, *The Twilight Zone Companion* (New York, 1982), 66–70, 72–73, 90–92, 226–27, 263–65; W. Warren Wagar, *Terminal Visions: The Literature of Last Things* (Bloomington, 1982), 29, 188; Robert Lowell, *For the Union Dead* (New York, 1964), 11; Ian Hamilton, *Robert Lowell: A Biography* (New York, 1982), 294–95; Thomas Merton, *Original Child Bomb: Points for Meditation to Be Scratched on the Walls of a Cave* (New York, 1962).

American periodicals, which surged upward in 1954, dropped off precipitously after 1963. Test ban and nuclear disarmament organizations either collapsed or receded from public view. When only twenty-five delegates showed up for the SPU convention in the spring of 1964, the organization disbanded.¹⁰

One of the first to notice the shift was Eugene Rabinowitch, editor of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* and a leader of the postwar "scientists' movement" that had campaigned for international atomic control. In January 1964 Rabinowitch observed:

As the year 1963 drew to its end, it found Americans in a changed mood. A year ago . . . [p]eace movements flourished and disarmament studies proliferated. It looked as if Americans were trying to come to grips with the critical problem of our age.

The acute concern and frantic search for solutions did not last long. . . . The abatement of the Cuban conflict, the test-ban treaty, and vague signs of rapprochement between the Soviet Union and the United States encouraged the public attention to turn in other directions.

Echoing Rabinowitch, in 1965 the Catholic journal of opinion *Commonweal* deplored the "lethargy" that had enveloped the nuclear weapons issue. In succeeding years, that lethargy remained a matter of frustrated comment by a few peace activists and social observers. "[W]riters rarely write about this subject anymore, and people hardly ever talk about it," noted columnist Stewart Alsop in the late 1960s, observing that "in recent years there has been something like a conspiracy of silence about the threat of nuclear holocaust."¹¹

Of course, the Bomb did not totally vanish from the American consciousness. In 1965 the *Pacem in Terris* conference in New York sponsored by Robert M. Hutchins's Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions attracted over two thousand people, who heard addresses by Pauling and other veterans of the test ban movement. In the late 1960s considerable journalistic and public attention focused on a Department of Defense proposal to construct an antiballistic missile (ABM) system in North Dakota; the Senate narrowly approved the proposal in August 1969. Scattered evidence also suggests that the nuclear threat remained very much alive, especially among the young, at the subconscious level of nightmares, fantasies, and inarticulate forebodings. When a massive power failure plunged the Northeast into darkness on the evening of November 9, 1965, many people jumped to the conclusion that a nuclear war was underway.¹²

¹⁰ Kelley to Boyer, Jan. 17, 1983; Massimo Teodori, "The Beginnings of the Movement," in *The New Left: A Documentary History*, ed. Massimo Teodori (Indianapolis, 1969), 24; Homer A. Jack, "Toward a U.S. Peace Movement," *WAR/PEACE Report*, Jan. 1966, pp. 14–16; Rob Paarlberg, "Forgetting about the Unthinkable," *Foreign Policy*, 10 (Spring 1973), 132–40.

¹¹ Stewart Alsop, "Neither Will I Again Smite Every Thing Living," *Saturday Evening Post*, June 17, 1967, p. 16; Stewart Alsop, "MIRV and FOBS Spell DEATH," *Reader's Digest*, June 1968, p. 134; Eugene Rabinowitch, "New Year's Thoughts 1964," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 20 (Jan. 1964), 2; James O'Gara, "Men of Peace," *Commonweal*, March 19, 1965, p. 779.

¹² Tom Stonier, "The Big Blackout: Unwitting Rehearsal for Nuclear War?" *WAR/PEACE Report*, Jan. 1966, pp. 12–14; Ned O'Gorman, "Peace and Pathos," *Commonweal*, March 19, 1965, pp. 783–85; Michael Mandelbaum, *The Nuclear Question: The United States and Nuclear Weapons, 1946–1976* (Cambridge, Eng., 1979), 113–19; "Forces Rally against ABM,"

One does see, however, a sharp decline in activism, public discussion, and cultural expression devoted to the nuclear weapons issue. In 1959, 64 percent of Americans had listed "War (especially nuclear war)" as the nation's most urgent problem. By 1965 that figure had dropped to 16 percent, and soon the issue vanished entirely from the list. Even the ABM debate was confined mainly to strategists, a few columnists, and a small band of arms-control specialists. "Surprisingly," wrote Jerome Wiesner, provost of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), in 1967, "there seems to be little public concern about the ABM issue, either pro or con."¹³

The climate of apparent obliviousness and unconcern continued well into the 1970s. "The atom bomb is a dead issue," concluded a sociologist studying student attitudes in 1973. In 1975 Samuel H. Day, Jr., successor to Rabinowitch as editor of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, wrote: "Public apathy . . . constitutes perhaps the most ominous of the various forces pulling the world toward a nuclear holocaust." The chorus of lament is striking in its unanimity. "Unless momentarily roused by crisis or threatening alert," asked a writer in the *Atlantic* in 1975, "who among us thinks of nuclear war anymore?" Reflected Cousins in 1976: "Hardly anyone talks anymore about nuclear stockpiles as the world's No. 1 problem. . . . The anti-testing clamor of the Sixties now seems far off and almost unreal." Political journalist Peter Ognibene, writing that same year, agreed: "Any politician who would now speak, as President Kennedy once did, about 'the nuclear sword of Damocles' poised above our collective head would be dismissed out of hand as an anachronism. The fear of nuclear war, once so great, has steadily receded."¹⁴

Why was the era from 1963 through the 1970s one of such quiescence on issues related to nuclear war and the nuclear arms race? The most reassuring answer would be that the complacency was justified—that the nuclear threat diminished in those years. Indeed, by 1975, 106 nations had signed the test ban treaty; 99, including the Holy See, had signed the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty; and the nuclear powers had agreed not to place atomic weapons in space, on the moon, or on the ocean floor. In 1967 a number of Latin American states pledged by treaty to forswear nuclear weapons. In 1972 the Strategic WAR/PEACE Report, Feb. 1969, p. 20; "On the ABM: Grassroots Action," *ibid.*, April 1969, p. 21; "Rallies Protest ABM," *ibid.*, June/July 1969, p. 22. Evidence on subconscious nuclear fear remains fragmentary, but see Hans J. Morgenthau, "Death in the Nuclear Age," in *The Modern Vision of Death*, ed. Nathan A. Scott, Jr. (New York, 1967), 69–77; Ron Rosenbaum, "The Subterranean World of the Bomb," *Harper's*, 256 (March 1978), 85–88; John E. Mack, "Psychosocial Trauma," in *The Final Epidemic: Physicians and Scientists on Nuclear War*, ed. Ruth Adams and Susan Cullen (Chicago, 1981), 21–34; Michael J. Carey, "Psychological Fallout," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 38 (Jan. 1982), 20–24; and the works of Robert Jay Lifton cited in n. 18.

¹³ Jerome B. Wiesner, "The Cold War Is Dead, But the Arms Race Rumbles On," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 23 (June 1967), 9; Albert H. Cantril and Charles W. Roll, Jr., *Hopes and Fears of the American People* (New York, 1971), 22–23; Gallup, ed., *Gallup Poll*, III, 1944.

¹⁴ Peter J. Ognibene, "Nuclear Game Plans at the Pentagon," *Saturday Review*, April 17, 1976, p. 14; [Norman Cousins], "The Nightmare That Won't Go Away," *ibid.*, 14; Mary P. Lowther, "The Decline of Public Concern over the Atom Bomb," *Kansas Journal of Sociology*, 9 (Spring 1973), 77; Samuel H. Day, Jr., "Our Unfinished Business," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 31 (Dec. 1975), 9; Richard Rhodes, "Reunion at Los Alamos," *Atlantic*, 236 (Nov. 1975), 81.

Arms Limitation Talks (SALT), begun in 1969, produced the SALT I treaties restricting the United States and the Soviet Union to two ABM systems each and pledging each nation to limit for five years its missile capability to launchers already operational or under construction.¹⁵

However, when one turns from the realm of treaty making to the real world of nuclear weaponry, a different and bleaker picture emerges. In both the United States and the Soviet Union, nuclear weapons research, construction, and deployment went forward at a rapid clip after 1963. Taking advantage of the test ban treaty's gaping loophole, both sides developed sophisticated techniques of underground testing. The United States conducted more tests in the five years after 1963 than in the five years before, some tests involving weapons fifty times the size of the Hiroshima bomb. The treaty may have been an "ecological blessing," concluded the MIT arms-control specialist Bernard T. Feld in 1975, but it was "an arms-control disaster." The Non-Proliferation Treaty's signers did not include the nations most likely actually to develop nuclear weapons. "No one believes it will long remain as a viable treaty," wrote one arms-control analyst in 1972, "unless the two major powers begin substantial disarmament."¹⁶

SALT I sidestepped what had by 1972 emerged as the most volatile feature of the nuclear arms race: not the number of missiles, but the growing destructive power and technological sophistication of nuclear weaponry. While the Soviet Union opted for larger ICBMs and warheads, the United States moved toward diversification and technical refinements such as MIRV (Multiple Independently Targetable Reentry Vehicle), by which each missile could carry up to sixteen highly accurate and separately targeted warheads. What Robert S. McNamara in 1967 called the "mad momentum" of the nuclear arms race steadily accelerated. The SALT process had "institutionalized" the competition, observed the Swedish arms-control specialist Alva Myrdal in 1976, but "by no stretch of the imagination can this be called arms limitation." A researcher at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, noting that in the flurry of nuclear treaty making not a single weapons system had been reduced or dismantled except to be replaced by a more modern one, was moved to quote John Stuart Mill: "Against a great evil, a small remedy does not produce a small result, it produces no result at all."¹⁷

¹⁵ John Newhouse, *Cold Dawn: The Story of SALT* (New York, 1973); United States Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, *Arms Control and Disarmament Agreements: Texts and History of Negotiations* (Washington, 1977), 36, 45–76, 89–91, 124–47.

¹⁶ Milton Leitenberg, "The Present State of the World's Arms Race," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 28 (Jan. 1972), 16; Chalmers M. Roberts, *The Nuclear Years: The Arms Race and Arms Control, 1945–1970* (New York, 1970), 79–94; "Moving Right Along," *New Republic*, Jan. 13, 1968, pp. 7–8; Gladwin Hill, "About 355 of 'Those Things' Have Exploded in Nevada," *New York Times Magazine*, July 27, 1969, pp. 6–7, 27–38; Bernard T. Feld, "The Charade of Piecemeal Arms Limitation," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 31 (Jan. 1975), 12.

¹⁷ Leitenberg, "Present State of the World's Arms Race," 21; "Remarks by Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, September 18, 1967," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 23 (Dec. 1967), 31; Alva Myrdal, *The Game of Disarmament: How the United States and Russia Run the Arms Race* (New York, 1976), 103, 106; Albert Legault and George Lindsey, *The Dynamics of the Nuclear Balance* (Ithaca, 1976), 267.

With so little objective basis for nuclear complacency, why did it occur? Yale psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton offers some illuminating speculations. Drawing on his interviews with Hiroshima survivors, Lifton in a 1964 article in *Psychiatry* and more fully in his 1968 book, *Death in Life*, advances the concept of "psychic numbing" to explain how the survivors had managed to carry on after their experience. In a crucial further step, he applies the same analytic concept to those facing the possibility of nuclear annihilation. According to Lifton, Americans resemble the Hiroshima survivors "more than we realize," living, like them, "in a world . . . dominated by holocaust—past, contemporary, and anticipated." The prospect of a nuclear end to history, he explains, robs man of that sense of "symbolic immortality"—the anticipation of "living on" through one's offspring, one's works, even through Nature itself—that hitherto helped people accept their personal death. Unable to confront that loss, we submerge threatening knowledge and childhood fantasies of annihilation and deny our nuclear awareness. "Nuclear-induced psychic numbing," Lifton insists, is "more than a defense mechanism. It really amounts to a reorientation of the entire self, with a muting of overall response to the nuclear environment." So threatening is reality that "to go about 'business as usual,' one has to deaden one's feelings about what one knows." Beneath the numbed surface, however, the "nuclear obsession" remains, affecting individuals and the culture in far-reaching ways. In his more speculative moods, Lifton sees many aspects of contemporary culture—the narcissism, the ephemerality of relationships, the resurgence of occultism and other-worldly religions—as nuclear-induced phenomena.¹⁸ With the diffusion of Lifton's ideas through his books, articles, and frequent public appearances, "psychic numbing" has emerged as a widely accepted explanation for society's passivity in the face of nuclear threat.

Suggestive as it is, however, the "psychic numbing" concept does not fully explain the alternating cycles of engagement, apathy, and renewed engagement that have marked Americans' response to the Bomb. It tends to reduce the complex texture of history to a single procrustean psychological formula. Confronted with such an all-encompassing explanatory concept, the historian seeks to flesh it out with more specific historical content. At times since 1945, clearly, the political and cultural currents have run counter to the individual propensity to "psychic numbing"; in other periods the cultural climate has encouraged that tendency. Keeping Lifton's insights in mind, then, we can ask ourselves why the years from 1963 to the late 1970s saw such a diminution of nuclear activism and awareness.

Many have attributed it to the influence of the Department of Defense and the major military contractors. Writing in 1970, one arms-control advocate blamed nuclear passivity on the Pentagon's "in-house steam roller" that

¹⁸ Robert Jay Lifton, "On Death and Death Symbolism: The Hiroshima Disaster," *Psychiatry*, 27 (Aug. 1964), 191–210; Robert Jay Lifton, *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima* (New York, 1968); Robert Jay Lifton, "False God," *Atlantic*, 226 (Oct. 1970), 110; Robert Jay Lifton, *The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life* (New York, 1979), 337–38, 345, 366, 367–68, 387; Robert Jay Lifton, *Boundaries: Psychological Man in Revolution* (New York, 1971), 339–52.

"forges ahead over all objections." Certainly few would deny the imposing reality of the military-industrial complex: for the principal military contractors and their hundreds of subsidiaries, as indeed for entire regions of the country, nuclear-weapons research, development, and construction represent economic interests of vast proportions.¹⁹ But does the fact that it has economic incentives to shape public attitudes in certain ways mean that the military-industrial complex therefore has the power actually to do so? Certainly the military services and corporate interests engaged in planning and producing nuclear weapons have their media outlets, and their influence on public perceptions is formidable. That explanation does not seem fully sufficient, however. Like Lifton's "psychic numbing," such influence is not time-specific; it cannot account for variations in public responses to the nuclear threat. Although nuclear weapons research and development have loomed large since the early 1950s, the level of activism and cultural expression directed to the issue has at the same time undergone dramatic shifts. The question, then, remains: Why did nuclear awareness and activism decline so precipitously in the period we are examining? Several reasons suggest themselves.

First to be considered is the *perception of diminished risk*. If the various treaties of these years failed to halt the nuclear arms race, they did convey the appearance of progress. As a disillusioned former advisor to the United States Arms Control and Disarmament Agency wrote in 1974, recalling President Richard M. Nixon's dramatic flight to Moscow for the signing of the SALT I treaty shortly before the 1972 election:

[O]bservers are using a new word to characterize the diplomacy of the superpowers: cosmetics. They mean cosmetics to prettify the faces of the two superpowers jointly and individually, cosmetics to glorify treaties that deal grandly with trivialities and non-existent threats, and cosmetics that help statesmen with their domestic political needs.

To the intense frustration of nuclear weapons opponents, the "cosmetic" approach provided a plausible rationalization to persons already disposed to psychic denial. "[T]he elaborate staging of arms control negotiations," wrote Day in 1975, "doubtless persuaded many that the threat is diminishing."²⁰

Nor, perhaps, was that perception entirely illusory. The intensity of nuclear fear at any given moment is presumably influenced by two distinct, though connected, realities: the quantity and nature of the world's nuclear arsenals;

¹⁹ David R. Inglis, "The Hazardous Industrial Atom," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 26 (Feb. 1970), 52. A still valuable survey of the economics and politics of the defense industry is Ralph E. Lapp, *The Weapons Culture* (New York, 1968). For the economic impact of one new system then in its infancy, see "Missile X: A Potential \$30 Billion Business," *Business Week*, Oct. 25, 1976, pp. 63–68. For the military-industrial complex's public influence, see Sidney Lens, "Thirty Years of Escalation," *Nation*, May 27, 1978, pp. 622–26; and Stanley Meisler, "The Brass Trumpet: Selling Militarism to America," in *Peace and Arms*, ed. Henry M. Christman (New York, 1964), 12–32. For a dissenting view, see Kosta Tsiplis, "Hiding Behind the Military-Industrial Complex," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 28 (June 1972), 20–23.

²⁰ Jerome H. Spingarn, "The Cosmetics of Disarmament," *WAR/PEACE Report*, June 1974, pp. 11–12; Day, "Our Unfinished Business," 8–9.

and judgments about the likelihood of their use. In the 1950s and continuing through the Cuban missile crisis, the fear that nuclear war might actually break out received periodic reinforcement from political pronouncements and international crises. With the Cold War thaw that commenced in 1963 and fitfully survived through the détente of the early 1970s, the diminution of fear had a certain rational basis, despite the superpowers' growing nuclear arsenals.

A second reason is the *loss of immediacy*. In 1946 Bernard M. Baruch reflected: "Time is two-edged. It not only forces us nearer to our doom if we do not save ourselves, but, even more horrendous, it habituates us to existing conditions which, by familiarity, seem less and less threatening." In the years after 1963, his words were amply borne out. Memories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki began to dim, civil defense was downplayed, and with atmospheric tests no longer dominating the media, the world's nuclear stockpile seemed increasingly unreal. "Familiarity takes the sting out of practically anything, even Armageddon," noted a journalist in 1966; "[nuclear weapons] constitute a danger so theoretical, so remote, as to be almost non-existent." Psychiatrist Jerome D. Frank made the same point in 1967: "Nuclear missiles poised to kill cannot be seen, felt, tasted, or smelled, and so we scarcely think of them." With the end of above-ground testing, observed P. E. Schneider in the *New York Times Magazine* in 1969, nuclear fear had become "diffuse and inchoate." "Our capacity for . . . response is dulled," agreed MIT physicist and arms-control advocate Kosta Tsipis in 1972, "because the danger is not present to our daily experience; it is a mental image . . . inconceivable to the large majority."²¹

The abstract vocabulary of the nuclear strategists and weapons technicians furthered the loss of immediacy in these years. The array of nuclear acronyms was confusing enough to make even a New Dealer blush: ALPS, BAMBI, BMD, ASAT, ELF, FOBS, MARV, SLBM, GLCM, MX, TNW, and so on. Even the names given the various missile systems evoked not their actual doomsday potential but reassuring associations with the heavens, classical mythology, American history, and even popular slang: Polaris, Nike-Zeus, Poseidon, Tomahawk, Minuteman, Pershing, Davy Crockett, Bullpup, and Hound Dog.²²

The loss of immediacy was self-reinforcing. As nuclear weapons literally went underground after 1963, the torrent of novels, movies, and television programs that had both fed and reflected the culture's nuclear fears slowed to a

²¹ Tsipis, "Hiding Behind the Military-Industrial Complex," 23; Hill, "About 355 of 'Those Things' Have Exploded," 6; "Address by Bernard M. Baruch," Dec. 5, 1946, mimeographed copy, box 1, William S. Parsons Papers (Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.); P. E. Schneider, "What We Can't Cover with Plants, We'll Paint," *New York Times Magazine*, Aug. 14, 1966, p. 19; Jerome D. Frank, *Sanity and Survival: Psychological Aspects of War and Peace* (New York, 1967), 27.

²² A useful guide through the forest is Arms Control Association, *A Glossary of Arms Control Terms* (Washington, 1979). The acronyms in the text refer to Alternative Launch-Point System, Ballistic Missile Boost Intercept, Ballistic Missile Defense, Anti-Satellite, Extremely Low Frequency (submarine communication system), Fractional Orbital Bombardment System, Maneuverable Reentry Vehicle, Submarine Launched Cruise Missile, Missile Experimental, and Tactical Nuclear Weapon.

trickle. Reduced media interest, in turn, facilitated the numbing process. Remote and largely invisible, the nuclear weapons issue was particularly ill-suited to the insatiable visual demands of television. The Jesuit peace activist Daniel Berrigan observed in 1977: "With the arms build-up, we're dealing with a kind of abstract preparation for the end of the world. That's something even the media don't seem to know how to handle." After 1963 the Bomb's corporate logo, the mushroom-shaped cloud, became a dated visual cliché, embalmed in history textbooks, where it had little more affective power than the lithographs of shivering soldiers at Valley Forge.²³

Some tried to restore the lost sense of immediacy. In the 1970s Daniel Berrigan and his brother, Philip Berrigan, took hammers to missiles on the production line, as in 1968 they had poured blood on draft records. In 1970 two University of Missouri sociologists showed their students the documentary film *Hiroshima/Nagasaki*, which portrays the victims' sufferings in horrifying detail. Predictably, when tested immediately afterward, the students showed a heightened resistance to the idea of nuclear war.²⁴ But for how long? Was it like the well-known phenomenon whereby drivers creep along for a few miles after passing a terrible highway accident, only to speed up again as the memory fades?

A third reason for the post-1963 decline of activism and concern about nuclear weapons is *the neutralizing effect of the "peaceful atom."* Eisenhower launched the international Atoms for Peace program as early as 1953, and the first domestic nuclear power plant opened in 1957. Not until the mid-1960s, however, did the program really gain momentum. By 1973 thirty-seven plants were in operation, with many more in the planning stage. Concurrently, the atom's peacetime potential received enormous publicity. The most indefatigable cheerleader was Glenn T. Seaborg, Nobel Prize-winning chemist and chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission from 1961 to 1970. In speeches, articles, and interviews, Seaborg described the nuclear utopia ahead: cheap power, medical wonders, agricultural abundance, a "junkless society" through the nuclear processing of waste materials, "international understanding and peace" thanks to nuclear-powered global television satellites. "Designed to blend into the natural landscape, low in profile . . . with all the distribution lines underground," and nestled in "park-like settings," Seaborg declared, future nuclear power plants would be "as close to an extension of nature as any human enterprise." The expansive Texan in the

²³ Stephen Kretzmann, "The Bomb in the Classroom," seminar paper, University of Wisconsin, Madison, spring 1982 (in Boyer's possession); Charles Fager, "Dan Berrigan in Santa Cruz," *Christian Century*, July 20, 1977, p. 657. A recent study of eleven major high school United States history textbooks found either no treatment or extremely sketchy treatment of the nuclear arms race and the destructive power of modern atomic weapons. Sharon Wigutoff and Sergui Herscovici, "Militarism in Textbooks: An Analysis," *Interracial Books for Children Bulletin*, 13 (1982), 15-17.

²⁴ Donald Granberg and Norman Faye, "Sensitizing People by Making the Abstract Concrete: Study of the Effect of 'Hiroshima-Nagasaki,'" *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 42 (Oct. 1972), 811-15; James Gilbert, *Another Chance: Postwar America, 1945-1968* (New York, 1981), 255.

White House echoed Seaborg's enthusiasm: in 1967 Lyndon Johnson delivered a speech entitled "Nuclear Power: Key to a Golden Age of Mankind."²⁵

In the nation's collective unconscious (if one may loosely use that Jungian term), a kind of psychological trade-off seems to have occurred, with glowing images of the benevolent atom obscuring and, to a degree, neutralizing dark images of the destroying atom. Political scientist and nuclear strategist Albert Wohlstetter observed in 1967: "Immediate bright hopes for civilian nuclear energy have been an emotional counterweight to . . . nuclear destruction." Indeed, the matter was often implicitly presented as a kind of zero-sum game: support nuclear power, and the threat of nuclear war will diminish correspondingly. As the *United States News and World Report* put it in 1967, the world had wandered far down the nuclear weapons path but was now at last crossing "the threshold into the era of the peaceful atom, with its promise of better things for all mankind." In a 1967 speech entitled "Need We Fear Our Nuclear Future?" Seaborg managed a resounding "No!" by the simple expedient of never mentioning weapons.²⁶ In reality, of course, there were not two separate worlds of atomic energy, but only one, whose various aspects were deeply intertwined. For a time, nonetheless, the allure of the peaceful atom played its part in muting fears of nuclear weapons.

Fourth, the nuclear apathy of these years was linked to the *complexity and reassurance of nuclear strategy*. In 1945–1950, as Gregg Herken has shown, and continuing into John Foster Dulles's days as secretary of state, atomic strategy as practiced in Washington was a fairly simple (if often unnerving) matter. By the 1960s, however, it had become an arcane pursuit dominated by a small group of civilian experts under contract to the military services and based at semiautonomous research institutes at the larger universities or at "think tanks" such as the Institute for Defense Analyses, the System Development Corporation, the Center for Naval Analysis, the Research Analysis Corporation (linked to the Army), and the RAND Corporation (closely tied to the Air Force). Using computer simulations, John von Neumann's Game Theory, and other analytical tools, the "defense intellectuals" transformed nuclear strategy into a rarified, quasi-scientific discipline. Conveying "the impression of holding membership in a closed club," as a writer in the *New Yorker* observed in 1971, they increasingly moved in their own intellectual and even social orbit. One critic, calling them "the new priesthood," noted that even in academia, with its tradition of scholarly openness, "they enjoy a privileged area of argument and can always retreat to a sanctuary of secret

²⁵ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Nuclear Power: Key to a Golden Age of Mankind," *Department of State Bulletin*, Dec. 25, 1967, pp. 862–64; Richard B. Morris, ed., *Encyclopedia of American History* (New York, 1976), 731; Glenn T. Seaborg, "Our Nuclear Future—1995," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 26 (June 1970), 10; Glenn T. Seaborg, "Need We Fear Our Nuclear Future?" *ibid.*, 24 (Jan. 1968), 36–42; "Life with the Atom after 25 Years," *United States News and World Report*, Dec. 11, 1967, pp. 64–66; "Amazing Atom Goes to Work," *ibid.*, Sept. 2, 1968, pp. 60–62; "Ahead: More Atomic Marvels: Interview with Chairman of Atomic Energy Commission," *ibid.*, pp. 60–63.

²⁶ Seaborg, "Need We Fear Our Nuclear Future?"; Albert Wohlstetter, "Perspective on Nuclear Energy," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 24 (April 1968), 3; "Life with the Atom," 66.

dataland." The names of only one or two of even the top strategists—men such as Wohlstetter, Herman Kahn, Thomas Schelling, Henry Kissinger (not yet a world-class celebrity), Donald Brennan, Bernard Brodie, William Kintner, Fred Iklé, Oskar Morgenstern, Robert Strausz-Hupé, William Kaufmann, and Glenn Snyder—would have been recognizable to the politically attentive public.²⁷

The public had only the dimmest awareness—analogue, perhaps, to a medieval peasant's grasp of the theological concepts with which Thomas Aquinas wrestled—of the strategic theories debated within the walls of the institutes and think tanks. The hermetic and esoteric nature of nuclear planning was thwarting and frustrating, not only to potential activists, but even to those citizens seeking to remain informed on nuclear issues. As early as 1959 Hutchins questioned whether democratic theory retained much relevance in the new era of strategic planning, and such apprehensions gained force in succeeding years. "The great issues of nuclear strategy . . . cannot even be the object of meaningful debate," wrote political scientist Hans Morgenthau in the mid-1960s,

because there can be no competent judgment without meaningful knowledge. Thus the great national decisions of life and death are rendered by technological elites, and both the Congress and the people at large retain little more than the illusion of making the decisions which the theory of democracy supposes them to make.²⁸

The substance as well as the process of nuclear strategy changed in these years. As the Soviet Union moved toward parity with the United States in nuclear warheads and ICBMs, American atomic saber rattling gave way to a new strategic emphasis: deterrence. The essential elements of deterrence theory had been developed by the Yale political scientist Bernard Brodie in a seminal 1946 work, *The Absolute Weapon*, and elaborated by Wohlstetter in a 1954 RAND study published under the title "The Delicate Balance of Terror" in the January 1959 *Foreign Affairs*. But it was in the 1960s, particularly toward the end of McNamara's tenure as secretary of defense, that deterrence theory was officially endorsed and given extensive public visibility as the cornerstone of United States nuclear strategy. As elucidated by McNamara in 1967, deterrence theory held that the point of stockpiling nuclear weapons was not to anticipate their use, but to prevent their use by the other side. Specifically, the Soviets had to be convinced that a nuclear first strike by them would trigger a retaliatory "second strike" that would devastate Russia itself. In McNamara's memorable words, nuclear security lay in "Assured Destruction": "the certainty of suicide to the aggressor—not merely to his military

²⁷ Roy E. Licklider, *The Private Nuclear Strategists* (Columbus, 1971), 33–36, 161; Arthur Herzog, *The War-Peace Establishment* (New York, 1965), 3–99; Daniel Lang, "A Reporter at Large: The Supreme Option," *New Yorker*, Jan. 9, 1971, p. 52; Ralph E. Lapp, *The New Priesthood: The Scientific Elite and the Uses of Power* (New York, 1965), 36; Irving Louis Horowitz, *Ideology and Utopia in the United States, 1956–1976* (New York, 1977), 307–23; Gregg Herken, *The Winning Weapon: The Atomic Bomb in the Cold War, 1945–1950* (New York, 1980), 195–280; Christopher Rand, "Center of a New World—III," *New Yorker*, April 25, 1964, pp. 92–110, 122–29.

²⁸ Lapp, *Weapons Culture*, 29; Robert M. Hutchins, "Is Democracy Possible?" *Saturday Review*, Feb. 21, 1959, pp. 15–17, 58.

forces, but to his society as a whole."²⁹ Challenging the commonsense assumption that the vast build-up of nuclear weapons increased the likelihood of their eventual use, deterrence theory helped mute nuclear fears and activist impulses. While prospects for nuclear disarmament remained questionable, wrote political scientist Roy E. Licklider in 1971, deterrence theory "removed much of its urgency, at least in the short run."³⁰

Not all Americans found deterrence theory persuasive. To disarmament advocates and others who believed that the reduction and eventual elimination of nuclear weapons ought to be a fundamental objective of American policy, the downgrading of that goal implicit in deterrence theory was dismaying. In the 1950s and early 1960s, it was subject to heavy criticism on these grounds. Reflecting the larger cultural shift, the criticism diminished after 1963, but it never disappeared entirely.³¹

Many who approached the nuclear dilemma from a religious or ethical perspective were appalled by the moral implications of a strategy predicated on the threat to wipe out an entire society. The elaborate edifice of deterrence theory rested on the threat of retaliation—and the threat had to be *credible* for the theory to make any sense. McNamara insisted on the government's "unwavering will" should the awful moment of decision ever come. "[T]he heart of a credible deterrent in a nuclear age," wrote Walt W. Rostow, chairman of the State Department's policy planning council, in 1964, "lies in being prepared to face the consequences, should deterrence fail." American security, Rostow went on, demanded an unflinching readiness to respond to any Soviet escalation "up to and including all-out nuclear war."³²

Precisely here lay the moral dilemma, giving rise to considerable soul-searching in religious circles, not only in the historic peace churches (Quaker, Mennonite, Church of the Brethren), but also in the mainstream Protestant denominations and even in the Roman Catholic hierarchy, traditionally a bastion of support for a policy of military strength. In 1965, drawing on the church's historic "just war" doctrine, Vatican II declared: "Any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities and of extensive areas along with their population is a crime against God and man himself. It merits unequivocal and unhesitating condemnation." What, then, was the church to say of a strategy whose avowed aim, to avoid nuclear war, depended on the "unwavering will" to destroy an entire people should the strategy fail?

²⁹ "Remarks of Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara," 26; Bernard Brodie, "War in the Atomic Age," in *The Absolute Weapon: Atomic Power and World Order*, ed. Bernard Brodie (New York, 1946), 21–69; Albert Wohlstetter, "The Delicate Balance of Terror," *Foreign Affairs*, 37 (Jan. 1959), 211–34; Licklider, *Private Nuclear Strategists*, 154–56; Laurence Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy* (New York, 1981). See also *Statement of Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara Before the Senate Armed Services Committee on the Fiscal Year 1969–1973 Defense Program and 1969 Defense Budget* (Washington, 1968), 41–58.

³⁰ Licklider, *Private Nuclear Strategists*, 156.

³¹ See Philip Green, *Deadly Logic: The Theory of Nuclear Deterrence* (Columbus, 1966). Philip Green's bibliographic essay is the best source on pre-1966 critiques of deterrence theory. See *ibid.*, 333–39.

³² W. W. Rostow, "The Test: Are We the Tougher?" *New York Times Magazine*, June 7, 1964, pp. 112, 113; *Statement of Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara*, 47.

"Surely," said a writer in *Commonweal* in 1971, "there is something obscene" in a policy predicated on such a threat. What if human error, technical malfunction, or some unforeseeable combination of circumstances triggered an attack or led to the mistaken impression that one was underway? The consequences, should deterrence fail through mischance, were awful to contemplate.³³

At the other end of the spectrum, many strategists, Pentagon planners, and weapons researchers never fully accepted the operational implications of deterrence theory. New weapons proposals continued to proliferate beyond any rational deterrent need. Even after McNamara publicly endorsed deterrence theory, the Pentagon's computerized war plan, Single Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP), continued to give targeting preference to Soviet military sites and missile bases, reflecting not only the deterrent principle but also of the desire to maintain an actual nuclear war-fighting capability.³⁴

Important as these qualifications are, deterrence theory as publicized in the later 1960s clearly reinforced the "psychic numbing" process for many Americans. In principle, it offered hope that ultimately the nuclear arms race would reach a point of stable equilibrium. Once each side had achieved a credible second-strike capability (McNamara's "Assured Destruction"), the race would end in a tie. Nuclear warheads would remain, but they would simply rest in their silos and submarine bays forever, endlessly deterring. Thanks to that theory, and the climate of détente, editorialized *Business Week* in 1968, "living with the atomic bomb has turned out to be less frightening than it once seemed."³⁵

Finally, we must consider the effects of *the Vietnam War and the rise of the New Left*. The nuclear weapons issue did not exist in a vacuum in these years; it was but one element of a complex cultural and political reality. Even as Americans hailed the test ban treaty, the preoccupation with Vietnam was looming on the horizon. From the major escalation of February 1965 to the final helicopter evacuation of Americans from Saigon a little over ten years later, the Vietnam War ruled the media and obsessed the national consciousness. It also provoked intensifying waves of protest. From the first "teach-in" at the University of Michigan in March 1965 through successive "mobilizations" and "moratoriums" to the final convulsive demonstrations on college campuses and in Washington against the Cambodian invasion of May 1970, the war in Southeast Asia was the primary focus of activist energy.

³³ Edward S. Boylan, "Is the ABM Moral?" *Commonweal*, June 11, 1971, p. 304; "Pastoral Constitution on the Church and the Modern World" in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott (New York, 1966), 294. See also Morton A. Kaplan, ed., *Strategic Thinking and Its Moral Implications* (Chicago, 1973); Thomas Nagel, "War and Massacre," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1 (Winter 1972), 123-44; and J. Bryan Hehir, "The Just-War Ethic and Catholic Theology: Dynamics of Change and Continuity," in *War or Peace: The Search for New Answers*, ed. Thomas A. Shannon (New York, 1980), 15-39.

³⁴ McGeorge Bundy, "Strategic Deterrence Thirty Years Later: What Has Changed?" in *The Future of Strategic Deterrence*, ed. Christoph Bertram (Hamden, Conn., 1981), 8; Mandelbaum, *Nuclear Question*, 202-03; Rosenbaum, "Subterranean World of the Bomb," 98-103.

³⁵ "Can Talk Stop the Arms Race?" *Business Week*, July 13, 1968, p. 31.

As early as 1964 the University of Chicago sociologist and activist Richard Flacks proclaimed Vietnam "the single most important foreign policy issue which peace groups can act on"; over the next five years, many thousands of Americans reached the same conclusion.³⁶ For peace activists, many religious leaders, college students facing the draft, and ultimately countless Americans of no strong ideological bent, a frustrating war that was claiming thousands of lives, devastating entire regions, and turning hundreds of thousands of peasants into refugees for purposes that seemed increasingly dubious had a moral urgency that could not be denied.

As media events, the war and the domestic turmoil it engendered had a vivid immediacy that the more abstract nuclear weapons issue could not begin to approximate. "The second round of Strategic Arms Limitation Talks have started in Geneva," the *Wall Street Journal* could report as late as 1973, "though even an attentive newspaper reader would scarcely have noticed amid the distractions of Vietnam hopes and fears."³⁷

From that perspective the nuclear issue seems not so much to have been consciously set aside as pushed to the background. The Bomb was a potential menace; Vietnam was actuality. When a Gallup poll in 1969 asked subjects to list the "two or three most important problems" facing the nation, 63 percent mentioned Vietnam and only 2 percent indicated the danger of nuclear war. "[M]any people who were formerly concerned about nuclear policy have shifted their attention to Vietnam," wrote Licklider in 1971, and by doing so removed "much of the public pressure on the American government to alter its nuclear policies."³⁸

The impact of Vietnam on the nuclear disarmament movement is vividly illustrated in the history of SANE. While some SANE directors, including co-chairman Spock, shifted entirely to the Vietnam issue, others strove to keep the antinuclear cause paramount. At an executive board meeting in July 1966, a catch-all entry entitled "Disarmament—Nuclear Tests—Non-Proliferation" appeared as item 9 on a long agenda otherwise devoted to Vietnam and related matters. The minutes for item 9 are revealing: "The Board discussed these issues briefly, recognizing the necessity for continued attention and action, but noted that the Vietnam issue must receive the major emphasis until the war is ended." Wrote executive director Donald Keys: "SANE would so much rather spend time and effort on the greater question of disarmament and . . . world peace. But is there any choice? Until the current national aberration is terminated, no major progress in other areas is realistic."³⁹

³⁶ Charles DeBenedetti, *The Peace Reform in American History* (Bloomington, Ind., 1980), 170; Sally Honan, "Groups Protest Vietnam, Ask Talks," *WAR/PEACE Report*, March 1965, pp. 15–16.

³⁷ *Wall Street Journal*, January 11, 1973, p. 12.

³⁸ Licklider, *Private Nuclear Strategists*, 157; Richard Lemon, *The Troubled American* (New York, 1971), 221.

³⁹ D. K. [Donald Keys], "What is SANE to You?" *Sane World*, June 1966; minutes of July 21, 1966, board meeting, "National Board Minutes, 1965–67" folder, box 2, SANE Papers, Swarthmore College Peace Collection (Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Pa.). The National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE)'s shift of focus in 1965 and after is clearly evident in the organization's biweekly newsletter, *Sane World*.

But deep differences in outlook remained. When Spock and other SANE leaders increasingly linked the organization to the most militant and radical wing of the antiwar movement, particularly at the National Conference for a New Politics held in Chicago in September 1967, those differences exploded openly. Keys and Cousins resigned; Spock himself soon departed. Years later, members of the SANE board would recall the tension and acrimony of the debates. A shadow of its former self, SANE in 1969 dropped the word "Nuclear" from its name. A short-lived splinter group, the Committee for Nuclear Responsibility (CNR), tried to take up the slack. "We thought we were carrying on what SANE should have been doing," the president of CNR, the physicist David R. Inglis, has commented.⁴⁰

Similar seismic shifts were occurring all across the spectrum of the nuclear-disarmament movement. At the University of Wisconsin, Students for Peace and Disarmament, founded in 1962 to oppose nuclear testing and the arms race, dropped the nuclear issue abruptly in the fall of 1963 to organize a rally protesting America's deepening involvement in Vietnam. (In England, as Nigel Young has shown, a comparable process was underway, as the Committee for Nuclear Disarmament and other anti-nuclear-weapons groups "faded into insignificance during the mid-1960s when they were overshadowed by the growing protests against the Indo-Chinese war.")⁴¹

Understandable and even inevitable as it seems in retrospect, this process was distressing to the dwindling band of older activists who continued to focus on the nuclear threat. "From the long-range nuclear-age point of view," wrote Inglis in 1967, "the most tragic feature of the war in Vietnam . . . is that preoccupation with this struggle is being allowed to stand in the way of the urgent business of making a far more devastating nuclear war less likely."⁴²

A closely related influence on post-1963 American nuclear attitudes was the emergence of the New Left, particularly the campus-based radical organization Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Founded in 1960 as an offshoot of the socialist League for Industrial Democracy, the national SDS at its peak in 1968 had some seven thousand members, with upward of forty thousand affiliated with three hundred to four hundred local campus branches. To treat SDS, or

⁴⁰ David R. Inglis interview by Paul Boyer, Nov. 7, 1982 (in Boyer's possession); Jerome D. Frank interview by Paul Boyer, Oct. 15, 1983 (in Boyer's possession); Donald Keys to members of the board of SANE, Nov. 13, 1967, mimeographed memorandum, "Material about SANE—1957" folder, box 1, SANE Papers; Donald Keys, "SANE's Wayward Drift to the Left," *WAR/PEACE Report*, Jan. 1968, pp. 14–16; Derek M. Mills, "From New Politics to Mass Catharsis," *ibid.*, Oct. 1967, pp. 8–9.

⁴¹ Nigel Young, "The Contemporary European Anti-Nuclear Movement: Experiments in the Mobilisation of Public Power," *PRIOR Papers*, March 1983, p. 3; *Daily Cardinal* (Madison, Wis.), Oct. 15, 1963, p. 2; Brian W. Ohm, "The Silence Before the Storm: Student Activism at the University of Wisconsin, 1945–63," seminar paper, University of Wisconsin, Madison, spring 1982 (in Boyer's possession).

⁴² David R. Inglis, "Missile Defense, Nuclear Spread, and Vietnam," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 23 (May 1967), 52. Cf. the 1973 comment of Paul Ramsey, professor of religion at Princeton University and author of a 1961 book on the ethics of nuclear war: "One of the tragic results of our Vietnam agony . . . has been that the intellectual energy still needed to subdue the paramount military problems of a nuclear age was drained off." Ramsey, *War and the Christian Consciousness*; Paul Ramsey, "A Political Ethics Context for Strategic Thinking," in *Strategic Thinking and Its Moral Implications*, ed. Kaplan, 135.

even a more loosely defined "New Left," as synonymous with the Sixties antiwar movement would be foolhardy. That movement was large and diverse. Even the New Left itself was notoriously amorphous; John P. Diggins has called it "a mood in search of a movement."⁴³ Nevertheless, New Left ideology was one of the important forces shaping the thrust and orientation of Sixties activism, and it merits attention in this context.

At the rhetorical level, the New Left talked a lot about nuclear weapons. In their 1962 *Port Huron Statement*, SDS's founders proclaimed themselves seared by atomic fears "when we were kids" and "guided by the sense that we may be the last generation in the experiment with living." "Our hopes for the future have been corroded by the Bomb," added SDS's 1963 manifesto *America and the New Era*. The editors of a 1966 anthology of writings by New Left activists noted: "Many of them were born in the year of The Bomb, and so their history begins with the history of nuclear destruction." In an act of conscious symbolism, one radical activist burned his draft card on the twentieth anniversary of the bombing of Nagasaki.⁴⁴

Adult sympathizers helped spread the idea that the Sixties' activists' lifelong association with nuclear weapons was crucial to their political orientation and gave them a unique moral sensitivity. "The bomb has had a wide, corrosive, and depressing effect upon the young," wrote the novelist Fletcher Knebel in 1968. "They sing their sad laments over guitars while the girls' long hair weeps for the coming suicide of humanity." Historians of the Sixties have echoed that theme. John Diggins, for example, speaks of "the young, who had inherited the atomic bomb as a child inherits an incurable disease."⁴⁵

Beyond the rhetoric, however, the New Left gave little serious attention to the nuclear issue and made little effort to sustain the thrust of the pre-1963 nuclear-disarmament movement. "It's just a cliché" was the succinct comment of one Harvard activist on the claim that the New Left's outlook was profoundly shaped by the looming shadow of the Bomb. Nuclear disarmament was doubtless implicit in the New Left's vision, but one finds few specifics in the literature. When nuclear weapons are mentioned, they usually appear as part of an exposé of the universities' role in military research or of a more general indictment of capitalist society. The problem "isn't just people who make bombs and airplanes," ruminated the then radical historian Christopher Lasch in 1970. "It's people who make anything. It's people who make lipstick." The issue was not simply nuclear weapons, Theodore Roszak agreed, but "the total *ethos* of the bomb," an ethos that also pervaded "our culture, our public morality, our economic life, our intellectual endeavors." The central significance of "the shadow of thermonuclear annihilation beneath which we cower," said Roszak, was as "the prime symptom" of morbidity in a society

⁴³ John P. Diggins, *The American Left in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1973), 176; Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS* (New York, 1973), 447, 664.

⁴⁴ Raymond Mungo, "The Road to Liberation (A Letter to What Used to Be His Draft Board)," in *New Left*, ed. Teodori, 349; Students for a Democratic Society, *The Port Huron Statement*, *ibid.*, 163–72; Students for a Democratic Society, *America and the New Era*, *ibid.*, 172–82; Paul Jacobs and Saul Landau, eds., *The New Radicals: A Report With Documents* (New York, 1966), 6.

⁴⁵ Diggins, *American Left in the Twentieth Century*, 159; Fletcher Knebel, "Can We Ever Really Ban the Bomb?" *Popular Science*, 193 (Dec. 1968), 61.

that was "fatally and contagiously diseased."⁴⁶ Effective as rhetoric, such metaphorical and symbolic imagery was not conducive to an analysis of the nuclear weapons problem on its own terms.

All the vague and general talk about "the Bomb" in New Left circles sometimes suggests an effort to establish at least a rhetorical link with the earlier anti-nuclear campaign. What in fact emerges most strongly, however, is the sharp discontinuity between the two movements. The conventional explanation—that Vietnam preempted all other concerns—certainly has validity, as we have seen, but it is not the whole story. The discontinuity is rooted as well in the inner history of the test ban movement in the early 1960s and the effect of that history on the New Left in its formative stages.

From the first, relations between the test ban-nuclear disarmament organizations and student activists were tenuous. Organizations like SANE sought to shape public policy through speeches, sober pronouncements, and advertisements heavily weighted with famous names and through access to sympathetic politicians. Its 1960 rally notwithstanding, SANE was not oriented toward demonstrations, marches, and mass action. SANE did have a campus branch, Students for a Sane Nuclear Policy, but it enjoyed little autonomy. "On arms control, we weren't looking for help from the youthful *polloi*," one SANE leader has candidly acknowledged. The campus-based SPU emerged in 1959 partially in frustration with SANE's rigidity, exclusivity, and general stodginess.⁴⁷

These latent stresses were exacerbated early in 1960 when Sen. Thomas Dodd of Connecticut charged that SANE was infiltrated by communists. An alarmed Cousins privately assured Dodd that SANE was determined to rid itself of any taint of disloyalty. SANE's national board excluded communists from membership, revoked the charter of the Greater New York Committee of SANE (a major target of Dodd's charges), and pointedly announced that SANE was a "deliberately autocratic organization" whose membership could be closely monitored.⁴⁸

All this caused an upheaval in SANE and in the peace movement. Several SANE directors resigned, including Pauling and veteran pacifist A. J. Muste. SANE's student branch broke with the parent organization. Campus groups committed to a test ban and nuclear disarmament but independent of SANE proliferated: Tocsin at Harvard, SLATE at Berkeley, Students for Peace and Disarmament at Wisconsin, and so on. The pace of activism—marches, demonstrations, petitions—quickened markedly. A San Francisco peace march in October 1960 drew two thousand participants. Women Strike for Peace, a grassroots movement started in the Washington, D.C., area in 1961, quickly

⁴⁶ Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (New York, 1969), 47; Thomas J. Cottle, *Time's Children: Impressions of Youth* (Boston, 1971), 268; William Braden, *The Age of Aquarius: Technology and the Cultural Revolution* (Chicago, 1970), 127. For New Left criticism of university-based nuclear weapons research, see Brad Cleaveland, "A Letter to [University of California, Berkeley] Undergraduates," in *New Radicals*, ed. Jacobs and Landau, 227; and North American Congress on Latin America, "Who Rules Columbia?" in *New Left*, ed. Teodori, 339.

⁴⁷ Teodori, "Beginnings," 23–24; Inglis Interview, Nov. 7, 1982.

⁴⁸ Deming, "The Ordeal of SANE," 200–05; Wittner, *Rebels against War*, 258–60.

organized demonstrations in sixty cities involving fifty thousand women. Discontent with SANE and similar narrowly based groups intensified. One activist complained that they had ignored "the organizational and tactical questions involved in influencing the thinking of the general public." The *Nation* saw in the realignments and ferment of 1960–1962 not just a new phase of the peace movement but "the birth of a new one."⁴⁹

The volatility of the situation emerged starkly in February 1962 when a coalition of campus peace groups led by Todd Gitlin and Peter Goldmark of Tocsin organized the Washington Project, which drew five thousand students to the nation's capital. Some met with senators, congressmen, and State Department officials. A small delegation even conferred with McGeorge Bundy at the White House on nuclear testing issues. (One reported with pride a secretary's praise of their well-groomed appearance.) Others—the wave of the future—held a mass meeting and took to the streets, marching, chanting, and carrying placards for nuclear disarmament.⁵⁰

By 1962, then, thousands of students had abandoned SANE's approach in favor of direct-action strategies aimed at fomenting a mass movement against nuclear testing and the nuclear arms race. With the test ban treaty, the urgency drained from the nuclear issue, but the activist zeal and the spirit of tactical innovation remained. Waiting in the wings was SDS. For many students the "new" peace movement of 1960–1962 provided a bridge to the New Left. Gitlin, for example, soon emerged as a major SDS strategist and, in 1963–1964, its president.⁵¹ Many other student peace activists followed a similar route.

The early New Left was determined to avoid what it saw as the failings of SANE and the 1950s peace movement. SANE had barred communists; SDS adopted a "non-exclusionist" membership policy. SANE was bureaucratic and impersonal; SDS prized face-to-face relations and the spirit of community. SANE was autocratic and centralized; SDS was casually organized and decentralized to the point of chaos.

The differences in tactics were no less pronounced than those in structure and style. SANE relied on its access to Washington power wielders and its ability to influence the educated middle class through the prestige of its sponsors and the impact of its psychologically manipulative (if factually sound) advertisements. The early SDS, by contrast, focused on the poor, prided itself on its nonmanipulative, nonexploitive approach, and adopted a posture

⁴⁹ "The New Peace Movement," *Nation*, March 3, 1962, p. 185; Nancy Reeves, "The Peace Movement," *ibid.*, 184; "Chronology of Events," in *New Left*, ed. Teodori, 478; Wittner, *Rebels against War*, 266–67; DeBenedetti, *Peace Reform*, 166–67; Clayton C. Barbeau, "They Walked for Peace," in *Peace and Arms*, ed. Christman, 109–12; Michael Harrington, "The New Peace Movement," *New Leader*, Aug. 20, 1962, p. 68.

⁵⁰ Steven V. Roberts, "Something Had to be Done," *Nation*, March 3, 1962, pp. 187–90; Arthur Blaustein, "The American Student—and Peace," *WAR/PEACE Report*, Jan. 1964, pp. 12–13.

⁵¹ Todd Gitlin, "The Radical Potential of the Poor," in *New Left*, ed. Teodori, 136–49; Todd Gitlin, "Power and the Myth of Progress," *ibid.*, 188–92; Sale, *SDS*, 663. Twenty years later, then a sociologist at the University of California, Berkeley, Todd Gitlin would write: "[O]ld themes quicken. It must be self-evident that the Class of '63 stands a real chance of not surviving to the end of the millennium. . . . Curiously enough, I circle back to Tocsin politics, 'vintage '60–'63.'" *Harvard and Radcliffe College Class of 1963: Twentieth Anniversary Report* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), 80.

of radical opposition to the establishment. With a grant from the United Auto Workers, SDS's Economic Research and Action Project (ERAP) in 1963–1964 sent organizers into ghettos and slums to discuss the residents' grievances, help them plan protest actions, and gradually lead them to an awareness of the power realities and class inequities that shaped their lives. Step by step the poor would be radicalized and become a part of the force contributing to the emergence of a new social order. "Only in this way," wrote Tom Hayden, SDS's president in 1962–1963, "can a movement be built which the Establishment can neither buy off nor manage." The *Port Huron Statement* gave a name to this strategy: "participatory democracy."⁵² An article of faith for the early New Left, that concept was both its most significant contribution to the radical tradition and its most explicit repudiation of the manipulative, elitist style of SANE and much of the 1950s peace movement.

The SDS community organizers quickly found that the nuclear arms race ranked well below such matters as garbage collection on the list of slum dwellers' concerns. Indeed, as one activist later wrote, the poor were often openly hostile to "large organization funded, top down peace propaganda programs."⁵³ That realization widened still further the New Left's distance from the nuclear disarmament issue.

If SANE was the negative role model for the early New Left, the civil rights movement was the inspiration and positive model. SDS in 1963 hailed "the upsurge of Negroes," as "the most direct, visible, and powerful challenge to the status quo and established power in America."⁵⁴ The tactics of black activist groups such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), with its sit-ins and marches, seemed eminently more promising—and exciting—than the staid, desk-bound approach of organizations like SANE. That the black activists understandably gave other issues priority over the nuclear-arms race reinforced the inclination of their white emulators in the New Left to do the same.

Ideological as well as tactical considerations underlay the early New Left's downgrading of the nuclear weapons issue. Reacting to the cool managerial style of the Kennedy administration, early SDS manifestoes portrayed the United States as a society controlled by government and corporate technocrats skilled in managing and rationalizing the political and economic workings of an advanced capitalist state. Though deeply suspicious of the technocrats, SDS ideologues rarely questioned their rationality or their managerial abilities.⁵⁵

⁵² Students for a Democratic Society, *Port Huron Statement*, 167; Sale, *SDS*, 102–15, 131–42; Tom Hayden, "The Politics of 'the Movement,'" *Dissent*, 13 (Jan./Feb. 1966), 84.

⁵³ "We've Got to Reach Our Own People," in *New Left*, ed. Teodori, 306.

⁵⁴ Students for a Democratic Society, *America and the New Era*, 179. The New Left's debt to the civil rights movement is noted by all its historians. See, for example, Sale, *SDS*, 23–24; Diggins, *American Left in the Twentieth Century*, 168–69; Teodori, ed., *New Left*, 12–19; Peter Clecak, *Radical Paradoxes: Dilemmas of the American Left, 1945–1970* (New York, 1974), 242; and Irwin Unger, *The Movement: A History of the American New Left, 1959–1972* (New York, 1974), 47–50. See also Irwin Unger's qualifying comment in *ibid.*, vii. The New Left's ambiguous but significant relationship with the test ban and nuclear disarmament movements of the 1950s, though noted in most of the studies, has received less attention.

⁵⁵ See Students for a Democratic Society, *America and the New Era*, 175–77. Among the thinkers whose work helped shape the view of society as a complex system managed by

That perspective defined SDS's view of the nuclear arms issue. Assuming (despite Kennedy's manipulation of the shelter issue for propaganda purposes) that the technocratic elite understood the irrationality of nuclear war and an out-of-control nuclear arms race, SDS further assumed that it would devise ways to avoid them. This assumption emerges most clearly in the 1963 manifesto *America and the New Era*, written soon after the test ban treaty was announced. Citing this agreement as well as "other first-step efforts at curtailing the arms race," the analysis concluded: "A deep desire to avoid general nuclear war is fundamental to the Administration's 'rational military policies.' . . . [T]he Administration recognizes that some forms of agreement with the Soviet Union are necessary if nuclear war is to be prevented." But while the technocratic managers in Washington could be counted on to avoid nuclear war and a spiraling nuclear arms race, SDS went on, they would not hesitate to engage in subversion, counterinsurgency wars, and other (non-nuclear) power tactics to protect corporate America's global political and economic interests. On the foreign-policy front, this, not the nuclear issue, would be SDS's main focus of activism.⁵⁶

Unquestionably, the 1960s supplied much evidence to support that analysis. Yet the radicals' assumption that rational calculations and the managerial skill of the technocratic elite would prevent nuclear war despite the continued existence of vast nuclear arsenals (an assumption they shared with the deterrence theorists) was a remarkable gesture of faith in human reason and technocratic expertise. A characteristic expression of that faith is Ronald Steel's comment in his 1967 work *Pax Americana*: "Non-nuclear war has become the substitute for the great war *which the atom bomb has made impossible*." Such confidence represented a sharp break with the activist perspective and cultural ethos of the 1950s and early 1960s, which held that the nuclear arms race was a fundamentally irrational, unstable, and highly dangerous process that might at any time escape from control through human error, technical malfunction (the *Fail-Safe* syndrome), or a fateful escalation by a nuclear power facing defeat in a non-nuclear conflict. The early New Left, for all its talk of "the looming shadow of the Bomb," did not share such fears—or at least did not systematically explore them in its theoretical work or embody them in its operational planning.⁵⁷

technocrats were Jacques Ellul, Herbert Marcuse, Paul Goodman, and, most centrally, C. Wright Mills, who saw America as "an enormous file, an incorporated brain, a new universe of management and manipulation." C. Wright Mills, *White Collar* (New York, 1951), xv. For useful discussions bearing on this point, see Nigel Young, *An Infantile Disorder! The Crisis and Decline of the New Left* (Boulder, 1977), 10–15, 19–20; Robert W. Tucker, *The Radical Left and American Foreign Policy* (Baltimore, 1971), 28–29; and Clecak, *Radical Paradoxes*, 31–71.

⁵⁶ Students for a Democratic Society, *America and the New Era*, 176–78; Carl Oglesby, "Trapped in a System," in *New Left*, ed. Teodori, 182–88.

⁵⁷ Ronald Steel, *Pax Americana* (New York, 1967), 341, italics added. As the 1960s wore on and as elements of the New Left became increasingly doctrinaire and violence-obsessed, the nuclear war threat dropped even lower on its agenda. Indeed, in 1969 the national Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) was in effect taken over by the Progressive Labor Party (PLP), a Maoist group that enthusiastically supported China's nuclear weapons program. (Said one PLP leader when China successfully tested a nuclear device in 1964: "The bomb is not just a Chinese bomb, it is a freedom bomb.") By then, of course, it hardly mattered, since the New Left was rapidly

The relationship between the radical movement of the 1960s and the nuclear weapons issue, then, was a complex and subtle one. Certainly after 1965 the Vietnam War was important in pushing the nuclear issue to the background, but even earlier the ideological and tactical thrust of the New Left had led it to break decisively with the organized test ban and nuclear disarmament activism of the 1950s. Convinced of the superiority of its tactics and of the greater penetration of its political analysis, the New Left played down its roots in the anti-nuclear weapons and test ban movements—roots that are plainly visible in many individual cases, from Gitlin, Hayden, Andrew Kopkind, and others of SDS to Abbie Hoffmann of the Yippie sideshow. As one SDS ideologue put it, they felt a total “lack of connection” with earlier movements. “To become a radical in such a situation,” he went on, “is virtually to give birth to oneself.”⁵⁸

The early SDS saw a role for the “urgency and dedication of middle-class peace advocates” but only on its own terms. It welcomed into the “new insurgency” those veterans of the nuclear disarmament movement who had broken free of “the complacency, the cynicism, and the loss of political will” characteristic of liberal reformism and had awakened to a realization of the abuses of power at home, the futility of cooperating with the establishment, and the need for a new social order. The campaign against nuclear arms, in short, was useful insofar as it served to arouse a radical consciousness.⁵⁹

Even such qualified efforts at rapprochement soon faded. In *The Making of a Counter Culture*, Roszak, himself a veteran of the earlier peace movement, wrote:

[P]recisely what do groups like SANE . . . tell us about adult America, even when we are dealing with politically conscious elements? Looking back, one is struck by their absurd shallowness and conformism, their total unwillingness to raise fundamental issues about the quality of American life, their fastidious anti-communism, and above all their incapacity to sustain any significant initiative on the political landscape.⁶⁰

Roszak's analysis is not without insight, but its dismissive, contemptuous tone is also a revealing indicator of the depth of the chasm between the self-born radicals of the New Left and the earlier nuclear weapons protest movement.⁶¹

The New Left's hostility toward the older generation of nuclear activists was in many instances fully reciprocated. Rabinowitch of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* was deeply critical of the Sixties activists, expressing his dismay in editorials with titles such as “Student Rebellion: The Aimless Revolving becoming a spent force on the political scene. Young, *An Infantile Disorder*, 314–23; Diggins, *American Left in the Twentieth Century*, 171–73, 183; Sale, *SDS*, 492–541.

⁵⁸ Ronald Aronson, “The Movement and Its Critics,” *Studies on the Left*, 6 (Jan.–Feb. 1966), 10; Sale, *SDS*, 36, 82; Andrew Kopkind, “The Sixties and the Movement,” *Ramparts*, 11 (Feb. 1973), 29–34; Abbie Hoffman, *Soon to Be a Major Motion Picture* (New York, 1980), 53–55.

⁵⁹ Students for a Democratic Society, *America and the New Era*, 181. As SDS's historian put it, SDS attracted only “the better—and most bitter—peaceniks.” Sale, *SDS*, 82.

⁶⁰ Roszak, *Making of a Counter Culture*, 25.

⁶¹ For a differing interpretation, stressing underlying continuities in the “peace movement” during these years of organizational upheaval, tactical shifts, and ideological conflict, see Wittner, *Rebels against War*, 240–86; and DeBenedetti, *Peace Reform in American History*, 157–200.

lution?" and "The Stoning of America," the latter a bitter attack on Charles Reich's *The Greening of America*. Another long-time campaigner against the nuclear arms race, Columbia University physicist I. I. Rabi, found it a "dispiriting experience" when he raised the issue with students in the late 1960s. They "didn't recognize the so-called 'ultimate weapon' as a unique menace to the species," Rabi recalled. "They kept spouting that society was corrupt."⁶²

One of the bitterest denunciations came from Keys, SANE's executive director. A Unitarian minister and peace activist, Keys in 1961 edited a collection of nuclear protests by religious leaders entitled *God and the H-Bomb*. On resigning from SANE in 1967, he issued a harsh blast at the New Left and what he saw as its disastrous effect on the larger American peace movement. The differences between the New Left and older organizations like SANE, he said, were fundamental. SANE believed in democracy and in the "common sense and goodwill" of the American people and placed "communication and dialogue with the public and the power structure at the center of its approach." SANE believed in working through the system for its broad-ranging but nevertheless specifically defined goals. New Left radicals, by contrast, "reject the democratic process, encourage violence, and offer only protest and opposition." Young people of the 1960s, "becoming conscious of social issues for the first time," Keys went on, had reacted "in a total way against the hypocrisy, gross materialism, and dehumanization of their society" and seemed unable or unwilling to "compartmentalize or fragment their response." No common ground lay between two such antagonistic approaches, concluded Keys: "The two major trends in the peace movement are by their nature incompatible and mutually divergent."⁶³ The breakdown of communication and mutual respect between the New Left and activists who for years had worked against the menace of nuclear war could hardly have been more complete.

By the late 1970s the combination of circumstances that for more than a decade had reinforced and intensified Americans' propensity for apathy in the face of the nuclear war threat was rapidly breaking up, and the renewed nuclear activism and cultural attention that would intensify in the early 1980s were beginning to stir. But much time had been lost. From the early 1960s to the late 1970s for reasons examined here, most Americans had seemed at least superficially oblivious to a mortal danger that many in earlier years had considered (and that many others in the years to follow would again consider) the most urgent ever to confront the nation and, indeed, the entire human family.

⁶² Lang, "Supreme Option," 55; Eugene Rabinowitch, "Student Rebellion: The Aimless Revolution?" *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 24 (Sept. 1968), 7–10; Eugene Rabinowitch, "The Stoning of America," *ibid.*, 27 (Nov. 1971), 33–37; Ruth Adams interview by Boyer, June 30, 1983 (in Boyer's possession); Charles Reich, *The Greening of America* (New York, 1970). Cf. Ralph Lapp: "[T]he [1960s] antiwar movement was somewhat disreputable. . . . I wasn't turned on by it at all." Ralph Lapp interview by Boyer, Dec. 28, 1982 (in Boyer's possession).

⁶³ Donald Keys, ed., *God and the H-Bomb* (New York, 1961); Keys, "SANE's Wayward Drift to the Left," 14; Keys to the board of SANE, Nov. 13, 1967, "Material about Sane—1957" folder, box 1, SANE Papers.